

The Honorable Rya W. Zobel
United States District Court
John Joseph Moakley U.S. Courthouse
1 Courthouse Way
Boston, MA 02210

Dear Judge Zobel,

August 17, 2005

My name is Stacey Guertin and I am writing this commendation in reference to Carla Paiva. Carla has been a friend of mine for many years, since we were young teens. I would like to share with you a little about myself and my relationship with Carla.

I am a 35-year-old married mother of two teenage boys. My husband and I just celebrated our twelve-year anniversary (!) and look forward to many more. We live in Fall River, Massachusetts in a beautiful little cottage that we bought about nine years ago. My sons attend Bishop Connolly High School in Fall River, and are very active in athletics and the Drama Club. I've worked for Citizens for Citizens Head Start Preschool Program, also in Fall River, as a preschool teacher for the last eight years. My husband has been a contractor with Easton Concrete Cutting and Drilling in Easton, Ma for the last seven years. We are involved in our community in many ways, my husband and I volunteer at The Veteran's Association of Bristol County and our sons volunteer at Faxon Animal Rescue League. I am currently working on a graduate degree from the University of New England and hope to complete the program next spring. We have two dogs and as a family we enjoy camping, kayaking, dirt bike riding and eating Portuguese food (I also love to shop for shoes!). We are a very close family and love each other very much.

I grew up in Fall River in a dysfunctional family with an alcoholic mother and a father who was a drug abuser and a Vietnam Veteran diagnosed with PTSD. I ran away from home when I was fifteen and never looked back. I lived with friends' from time to time and back porches the rest of the time. I had one backpack of belongings and an angel that kept me safe through it all.

I met Carla at a mutual friend's home and we immediately hit it off. Carla was about 13 years old and a runaway also. Carla had been on the streets for a while, along with most of her siblings. Carla's mother had been given the choice by the Department of Social Services (DSS) of keeping her 9 children in her custody or leaving her physically abusive, alcoholic husband. She

chose her husband and the children were sent to separate foster homes. Eventually, Carla and most of her siblings ran away from their foster homes.

Even though Carla ran, she did keep in touch with one foster parent, Elaine, who was very supportive and cared for Carla deeply. Carla returned to Elaine's home when she became pregnant with her son Russell. It was either that or DSS would remove Russ from her custody. Carla was only fifteen when she became pregnant and needed all the support she could get. Elaine helped her with Russ and gave her a safe, dependable place to be. Elaine and Carla remain close to this day.

Although Carla kept in close contact with her foster family, she also had 8 siblings in various locations, and each with their own issues of abandonment. Carla remained loyal to her siblings and supported them through many issues while trying to keep her own head up. Carla's siblings were not able to develop positive relationships with responsible adults. Most lived the street life for many years and some still do. Carla felt responsible for them and always tried to steer them in the right direction.

Throughout this time Carla had her own issues dealing with an abusive boyfriend, narcotics and 'ghetto' life. Regardless of what decisions Carla made, she always had the best intentions for herself and her son. Unfortunately, Carla did not graduate from high school and I believe the last grade she completed was 8th grade. She has had to work in low paying jobs without benefits and security, and still does. She has somehow managed to raise a great kid who loves her very much and would be in dire straits if she were not around. Believe it or not, Carla is very strict with her son, she fears he will follow the 'wrong' path if not. She depends on him to keep her sane and he depends on her because she is a devoted mother who is scared to lose her son to the same streets that took her family.

The situation that Carla finds herself in right now is shocking and inexcusable. Although I had minimal contact with her during this time, I do know that the decision to do what she did was out of desperation and pressure from her boyfriend. The situation, as I understand it, was a desperate measure to generate income after losing her job and having difficulty finding another. At the time she lost her job, Carla was the sole supporter in her home. Her boyfriend was unemployed and he had begun associating with a troublesome crowd. Although resistant at first, Carla eventually became caught up in the ordeal after prompting from her boyfriend. The reality of not having any income, pending eviction, unpaid bills, literally no food in the home and a broken spirit caught up with her. Not an excuse, but definitely an 'easy' way out, she became involved.

Perhaps because she was embarrassed or not able to face the truth about what she was doing, she withdrew from the positive people in her life.

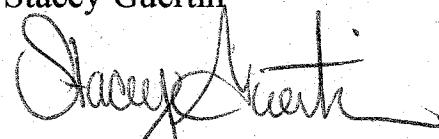
When the situation came to a head she then desperately sought out support and direction. Although frightened about how it ended, she was relieved to be 'rescued' from the situation. She has struggled with the fact that her son knows about what happened, after all she tried to protect him from. She has tried to explain to him why, but there is no good reason why, and she knows it. She regrets the decisions she made and now pays for them with her sons' fear of losing his mother, and her fear of losing him. She also realizes that her healthcare career has been jeopardized and her reputation has become questionable. Not a day goes by that she does not cherish with her son. I fear what will happen to Russ if Carla is sentenced to time in prison. He just turned 15 and will begin high school a week before her court date. She does not feel it's safe to place him with any of her siblings because of their lifestyles and she fears putting him in foster care.

This plea is not to excuse Carla's actions; it's to ask for her sentencing to be thoughtful of her son. She owes society for the counterproductive choices she has made, and has already begun to feel the consequences of her actions. Although employed for a short time after the arrest, the nursing home she worked for closed indefinitely. She is currently laid off and desperately seeking new employment. Fearful of what September will bring, she keeps her head up and hopes for the best while preparing for the worst. She is trying to remain positive and has looked into new career choices and training. We have joined a gym together and find it's a great way to relieve stress and keep in close contact.

On a daily basis Carla voices regret for what she's done and how it has affected her son. Her attitude about life and the choices we all have to make to survive has become a positive determination to do the best she can for her son and herself. I would plead that you have mercy on her son and allow Carla to remain with him, as she belongs.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Stacey Guertin



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